What Mothers must tell their Children.

BY

MARY SCHARLIEB, M.D., M.S.

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WHAT MOTHERS MUST TELL THEIR CHILDREN.

By MARY SCHARLIEB, M.D., M.S.

MOTHERS,

I have been asked to write a tiny little book to help you in one of the most difficult tasks that you will ever have to undertake. I am sure that you must realise the very great importance of good health, both of body and mind, and that you must be extremely anxious that your children should enjoy these priceless blessings. It is, however, not possible for anyone to secure good health and the happiness it brings unless they know in what good health consists, and also unless they know what may spoil their health, and have been taught how to avoid danger. You will agree with me that is a part of your duty towards your children that you should teach them all things that are necessary for their future happiness, and in order that you should be able to do this you yourself must have some knowledge of the way in which the human body works, and of the manner in which our little children gradually change from the condition of childhood into that of men and women. First, I should like to tell you something about your girls, and no doubt

much that I say is quite familiar to you. Looking back on your own life you are quite well aware that a very wonderful change occurred, both in your body and in your mind, somewhere about thirteen or fourteen years of age. You remember that as a little girl your body was straight and what you call undeveloped; then when you were about to change into a young woman your breasts became larger and rounder, the nipples stood out more from the surface and the coloured part round the nipple became larger and deeper in colour. About the same time hair began to grow in your armpits and on the lowest parts of your body; your complexion improved, your eyes became bright, and your hair glossy. Everyone around you said "How much that girl is improved, but she is no longer the little child, she is quite a young woman." At the same time that all these outward changes were occurring there were many inward changes, changes that no one could see, and of which you yourself knew nothing. This internal development, just like the external, was part of the great change which had to occur in order that you should become fit to be a wife and a mother. We all know that in every woman's body there is an organ called the womb. This is really the little house provided by God in which babies are to be kept safe and warm while they are growing big enough and strong enough to live in the outside world. In the young woman who has never been pregnant, and in all women who are not pregnant at the time, the womb is a small organ

about the shape and size of a jargonelle pear. It is placed in the body with its larger end up, and the part that corresponds in position to the stalk end of the pear is directed downwards. Inside the pear there is a part called the core, but inside the woman's womb there is a tiny space lined with soft mucous membrane, just like the lining of your mouth, and it is in this small cavity that the infant gradually develops. Now where does the baby come from in the first instance? Well, close to the womb at either side there is a small gland about the shape and size of an almond in its shell. These little bodies are called ovaries, and in them, even from the time of birth, there are a large number of little cells, which really correspond to eggs. All through childhood these tiny eggs remain quite quiet and unchanged, but when the girl is about to become a young woman changes occur in these internal organs quite as wonderful as the changes that occur on the surface of her body. More blood is supplied to the ovaries and to the womb, also the nerves of those organs wake up, and after a time one or more of the eggs in the ovary becomes ready to pass out from that organ down a very slender tube which communicates with the cavity of the womb. When thus occurs there is a good deal of excitement in the internal organs, they are very richly supplied with blood, and just about the time that the tiny egg is passing down the tube from the ovary into the womb the lining membrane of the womb becomes overfilled with blood, and many of the invisible little blood vessels in the mucous

membrane are so over-congested that blood flows out, first into the cavity of the womb, then through its open mouth into the female passage, and appears externally. Now this is the process which is known as *menstruation*, and when the blood mixed with the natural mucus of the part appears externally a girl is said to have her period. From this description you can quite well understand that menstruation is a perfectly healthy process. It is not right to speak of a girl being "unwell." Healthy girls are perfectly well during the period; at the same time it is easy to see that as all the internal organs are working so much harder than usual and that as they have to be supplied with more blood than at other time, it would be quite easy for the natural and proper congestion to become excessive and to cause pain should the girl get her feet and legs wet or cold, or should she foolishly over-exert herself just at that time. I should like to tell you a little more about menstruation, because so many mothers and girls do not understand what is happening, and in consequence they are apt either to be too careful and fidgety or not to take sufficient pains to maintain their health at a very important time of life. Menstruation may begin as early as twelve, or even eleven, years of age, and as a rule it is early in healthy girls who are well fed and comfortable in the circumstances of their life. On the other hand, the periods may be delayed until a girl is seventeen or eighteen, and yet there may not be anything wrong. It may be, and usually is, only a personal peculiarity. Menstrua-

tion generally occurs every twenty-eight days, but there is no reason for anxiety if it should come a few days earlier or a few days later. Many women and girls think that they must be ill if the period is slightly irregular in time or in amount. It is well, therefore, for them to know that such variations are not a sign of disease nor of ill-health, and that the periods may last from three to six or seven days, and that the girl may use from three or four up to ten or twelve diapers, without her health suffering in any way. If you come to think of it this is really quite reasonable, for some girls are big and broad and strong, they are fat and rosy, and could evidently afford to part with more blood than the smaller and more delicately made girls, and yet the small, delicate-looking girl may enjoy as good health as does her more robust sister. Another thing to be remembered is that girls very frequently are somewhat irregular, both in the quantity of blood lost and in the length of the period, until their constitutions have settled down. It sometimes happens that a girl will menstruate once and then not again for a year. This should not occasion alarm unless there are other symptoms of poor health, such as pallor, want of appetite, want of strength, headache and constipation. We have to remember that just as every blade of grass is different from every other blade of grass, so every human being is different from every other human being. We all have what is called *our own type*, and this type does not become settled for any of us until our development is finished.

That is the story of menstruation, but after the days of girlhood are over and the young woman is fully formed she may marry, and then instead of the female egg passing away unnoticed and menstruation occurring, fertilisation occurs. The life-giving cells which come from the husband meet the egg, enter it, and bestow upon it the power of commencing a new human being. The story of the beginning of life is practically the same throughout the higher plants and animals right up to man. In nearly all cases there are the two different kinds of cells, the egg or seed derived from the female, and the smaller cell derived from the male plant or animal. This fertilising cell enters into the egg and bestows upon it the new power of growth and development from which there comes into being the seedling plant or the baby animal. The story is equally true of the lilies of the field, or the tiny fishes, the little frogs, the kittens, the puppies, and the babies. This is the way in which the great Father of all has given power to His creatures, whether plants or animals, to reproduce themselves. Thus is fulfilled the divine command, "Be fruitful and multiply." When the egg is fertilised and the new being has commenced its existence it is much too small and too feeble to live unprotected in the world, and so the mother animal and the human mother also, receives the tiny speck of jelly which represents the future child within her womb, and there it is kept warm, it is nourished by the mother's blood and partakes of the mother's life.

Anything that is good for her is good for it, and everything that is bad for her has an evil influence on the rapidly growing child. This is a great reason why expectant mothers should be careful of their health, why they should eat and drink only such things as are good for them, and why they should avoid everything that they know will hurt them. All excessive food that might cause indigestion, and all excessive drink which leads to disease of the stomach, the liver, the kidneys, and indeed the whole of the body, must be avoided. The expectant mother should also be very careful to get her right share of rest and sleep and exercise. Work within the limits of her strength is good for her, but over-long hours or very hard work, especially if the work has to be done in hot and stuffy rooms, is bad for her. She should be particular to keep her bowels regular so that all useless material is regularly cast out from her body and nothing but what is good and useful, both for her and for her child, should be retained.

The wonderful rapidity of growth, both of the child and of the womb which contains it, can be readily understood by anyone who thinks of the difference in size between a little cell so small that you can only see it with a microscope, and the beautiful full-grown baby that one sees when it is born. The womb also grows with astonishing rapidity from the small organ the size of a jargonelle pear to a bag large enough to contain the full-grown baby. Is not all this a wonderful fairy story, and

does it not remind you of the hymn which says "The seed in silence slept through months of faith and patience till forth the green blade crept?" Every mother knows something of those "months of faith and patience," that long time of waiting while she was expecting her baby, and the doubt which sometimes crossed her mind whether after all there would be a living healthy baby to be her pride and joy, or whether something might go wrong with the child. I want you mothers to remember that your little girl of to-day is, in a few years' time, very likely to be herself a young married woman. Think that then she will have to go through just the same doubt and anxiety that you went through, and that she will be very glad to have the comfort and support you can give her if you will only tell her something of the wonderful wisdom and goodness that watches over our helpfulness from the beginning of life onwards.

* * *

Why we should tell our Children about the Facts of Life.

Now do you not think that it is a great pity for girls to grow up ignorant of the wonderful powers that belong to their own bodies? Is it not hard on a girl that she should not be told in good time of what she has to expect both during the change from childhood into girlhood, and also of the extraordinary dignity and happiness to which she may be called a little later in life? Sometimes one hears of

girls who have had a very bad nervous shock by menstruation coming on without their knowing that any such thing was likely to occur. Any girl who did not know about this function would, of course, think that something dreadful had happened, and it is very hard on her that her mother should permit her to grow up to the time when this change may be expected without being told that this is the natural and proper development of her body, and that it occurs in all girls. A good and wise mother who knows something of the functions of her own body and who understands that unless these changes occur perfect womanhood is impossible, ought to tell her daughter practically what I have been telling you. There is a very natural curiosity among young people about the facts of life, and all little children wonder how these things can be. Little people have eyes to see and brains with which to think, and when they find that the cat has new kittens, that the dog has puppies, and the little birds come out of their egg-shells, they are very eager with their questions of how did these little ones come, and where did they come from? Just in the same way even quite small children of four or five years of age are likely to ask where the mother got her new baby. I am sure that you will agree with me that it is altogether wrong and unfair to snub the child and to tell it not to ask questions, and also you will agree with me that an even worse plan than snubbing is to tell the child something that is not true. Children expect their parents to be everything that is good and wise;

they have a strong instinct which enables them to find out when we do not tell them the truth, and any mother who tells her child that the doctor brought the baby in his black bag wounds her little child's love for her and his trust in her. The child knows quite well that the mother's answer was untrue, and his trust in her will never again be as perfect as it was before. Very likely he will not ask her any more questions, but sooner or later he will ask other people the questions and then, unfortunately, he may learn the truth in the way that the mother would most object to. Probably she refrained from telling him anything about the matter because she was anxious not to give him this sort of instruction too young, but the very fact that the child asked her the question shows that he had begun to think on the subject, and we all know how persistent little people are in trying to get information. And so it comes to pass that the great and wonderful truth which the mother would have told the child in a reverent spirit and in beautiful words is told to him in the most vulgar and abominable way by some nasty-minded, grown-up person, or by some ignorant school-fellow, and so the little child's innocent mind is stained by the vulgarity of what he is told, and at the same time his trust in his mother is injured. It is quite true that small children should only be told what they can understand. For instance, the little one of four or five will probably be satisfied if the mother tells him that God sent the cat her kittens, or that God sent her the new baby, and if the

child asks her questions the answers to which are certainly above his understanding, she can say "That is all I can tell you now, but if you will ask me again after a little time I will explain it all to you." Very frequently that time comes when the children are seven or eight years of age; at any rate, the time comes much sooner than most mothers think possible. She must be prepared to answer the questions truthfully and reverently. In addition to the information that God gave the baby, she must be prepared to say something of how it was given. Sometimes it happens that the mother herself is expecting another little one. If so it is well for her to tell the child beforehand something of what is going to happen. For instance, I know a lady who had a little daughter about seven or eight years of age, and she herself was expecting a baby in about three months' time. One day when the child was alone with her she told her that very soon she would have a new little brother or sister, and that she, the mother, would want her to help in the washing and dressing of the expected infant, and she wanted her more than ever to be a good child, so that the new baby might learn from her how to be good and obedient. The little girl immediately asked the mother how she knew that a baby was coming, and then the mother, in very tender, loving words, told her child how God was sending her the baby, that it was too small and too weak to live in the world by itself, and therefore God had put it in her body to be kept warm and safe, that it was

living in a little house close to her heart, until the time when it should be big enough and strong enough to live in the world. The little girl was, of course, delighted, not only with the promise of the new treasure, but also with the wonderful story of how God had entrusted it to the mother's safe keeping. Then came the caution that should never be omitted on these occasions. The mother told her little girl that this was a great secret, a secret between herself and the child and God. That these things were never talked about to strangers, and that she trusted to the little girl's honour that her secret should be mentioned to no one. Children love secrets and keep them well, and the mother who tells her child these great truths will not have any reason to regret her confidence.

The question is not whether children shall know or shall not know these things, but the question really is in what way they shall know them. Will the mother tell the child herself at the right time, and in the best way, or shall the child be left to the pollution and injury to its purity that is sure to occur if these most sacred subjects are discussed in an improper manner?

Some time or other the father's share in the transmission of life will be asked about.

Nature study is a real help in this matter.

Elementary botany is taught in most schools, and children see the beautiful arrangements for the continuance of vegetable life.

The teacher shows the children some large flower,

such as the Madonna lily. She tells them that the anthers, or little boxes, which contain the golden dust, are the male part of the plant, and that when this pollen is ripe the little boxes open and the golden grains fall on a green, sticky, cushion part of the female organs. At the base of this sticky cushion or stigma is a little box, in which are the female seeds of the plant. When the pollen falls on the stigma small tubes begin to grow down from them to the seeds. The seeds could not fertilise themselves, but the male influence which reaches them through the pollen tubes endows them with life and with the power to produce new lilies.

It must be explained that not only vegetables, but animals, too, increase and multiply in consequence of the union of the male and female elements—the father and the mother. Every frog, kitten, puppy, and baby has both a "father and a mother." The living fertilising seed from the male is conveyed into the female's body, and, uniting with her seed (or microscopic egg), it causes growth and development, and so changes an invisible speck of jelly into a fully-developed baby.

If the children learn this wonderful lesson, they begin to understand why the Bible tells us: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife—and they twain shall be one flesh."

Some parents may feel that this is a difficult subject for them to deal with, but the best way for them to meet the difficulty is to keep always in touch with

their children. When they were babies there were no reserve and shyness between them, and as they grow older constant sympathetic talks on all subjects should prevent any wall of separation from growing up. I have already told mothers about their girls, now let us think about the boys.

It is the mother's duty to teach her little son from very early years the necessity of keeping his whole body clean and sweet. She should teach him not only to care for his face and his hands, but also for what people call "the private parts." She should show him, while he is still quite a little boy, how he can thoroughly wash and cleanse these parts, and she should impress upon him that these organs are very important and that his general good health depends on them being kept clean. As he grows older and development begins he is very likely to feel uncomfortable sensations connected with this part of his body. But the wise mother should not be upset and anxious about this; she should remember that boys have to develop much in the same way that girls do, and that changes, both seen and unseen, are as natural in the one child as in the other. When her boy was a baby she will have noticed that in the part of the body frequently called by children "the purse," there are two little balls about the shape and size of a robin's egg. In these little organs are formed the wonderful cells which are able to fertilise the female egg, and as we have seen before, it is upon the union of these two different kinds of cells that the procreation of chil-

dren depends. The life-giving cells in the boy's organs are not fully developed until he is perhaps fourteen or fifteen years of age. Just as in the case of the girl, there is about this time a great increase both in the supply of blood and in the supply of nerve power to the generative organs, and in the case of the boy there is sometimes a discharge of a little colourless fluid through these organs about once a fortnight. If the boy has not been warned that this may occur he will probably think that something quite unusual has happened, and that he must be ill. Unfortunately, if the boy does not feel that he can consult his mother he is only too likely to fall into the hands of a quack who will play upon his fears and pretend that a perfectly right and natural occurrence is a sign of disease for which medicines and lotions must be purchased. The waste of money on quack remedies is the least injury that this wicked deception causes to the unfortunate boy. The unnecessary fears and the distorted ideas implanted in his mind do him far more injury. The mother ought to know enough of what is right and natural in her boy's body to be able to tell him that this evident development, his uncomfortable sensations, and his newly-developed powers, far from being reasons for regret and for fear, are really the signs that he is going to be a proper man, with all a man's endowments. The mother should also take occasion to tell him that these changes are fitting him for fatherhood, that the day will come when he will marry, and that if he has taken proper

care of himself he will have good health, and his children when they come will be bonny, healthy, little creatures likely to bring him much joy.

Boys only too readily acquire the habit of self-abuse. It is not always their own fault, because they may have been led into the evil habit of rubbing and pulling their organs in order to obtain relief from various irritations. Mothers should be careful to ask the doctor who attends them in child-birth whether the boy baby needs circumcision. If the natural fold of skin which hangs over the end of the organ cannot be pushed back so as to enable the part to be properly washed, it is probable that some natural secretion may collect and dry under the fold of skin, and by causing irritation would lead to pulling and rubbing and so to the formation of bad habits. The same kind of irritation is likely to occur in children who suffer from threadworms, and in those in whom for any reason the urine is unhealthy. In the case of a child who seems to be acquiring bad habits a doctor should be consulted so that whatever the trouble may be it may be cured before the child has acquired the habit of self-abuse. A boy who practices masturbation, as these bad habits are called, is very likely to acquire an irritable condition of his generative organs that will greatly increase the frequency of the natural discharge and will also probably lead to great difficulty in self-control as he grows older. Mothers ought to very carefully warn their sons that anything which interferes with the naturalness and the healthiness

of their bodies is likely to interfere with their developing manhood. They ought to be told that a premature or improper use of God's good gifts is sure to lead to trouble, very likely to disease. Some people have a stupid idea that if a young man does not use his manly powers while he is still quite young, he will certainly suffer, either in general health or in a lessening of his manly strength. Young lads are therefore often advised by older boys and men to give full range to their inclinations, and as these bad advisors would say, to prove their manhood. Doctors know quite well, and any good doctor will tell a lad or young man that he ought to restrain himself, that he ought to deny himself gratification until he marries; that no harm can possibly come from abstinence, and that very serious diseases and other troubles are sure to come from premature or improper use of the body. Another thing that mothers ought to tell their sons is that their future wife has a perfect right to expect that her husband will come to her as pure in mind and as virgin in body as he wishes to find her. It is not fair, to say the least of it, that he should have taken off the bloom and the beauty of his mind and body, and offer the girl of his choice something second-hand. A young man feels that he has a right to expect that he is the first and the only love, and that his girl has been true to him up to the time of their union. Surely the girl has an equal right to expect that she is the first and only love of the young man to whom she gives herself.

Dangers that are Due to Ignorance.

There is another subject on which it is necessary for mothers to instruct their children, and this is the most difficult duty of all. I think that any nice, pure-minded woman, gifted with the deep mother love which makes all motherly duties easy, must feel, when she comes to think of it, how necessary it is that her children should not become young men and young women, nor enter on the difficult duties of married life, without having learnt from her those things that they ought to know. But all the things of which I have written up to the present point are natural to the human body, they are all part of the divine order, they are among the things upon which God looked in the beginning of creation, when it is said that He "saw all things that He had made, and behold they were very good."

There are, however, things of which mothers ought to tell their boys and girls that are not natural, that are not right, but which are indeed very evil. Some great troubles come to both men and women from a misuse of their natural powers. If very unfortunately a boy or a girl has attempted to live a married life before marriage, that is to say, if they have prematurely and wrongly used the sacred powers of their body, it is only too likely that such young people may have injured themselves, and in consequence of their want of care and foolishness they may have acquired certain diseases. These diseases are known as *venereal diseases*. One

is called syphilis, and the other gonorrhœa. The two diseases are not the same, although they may both be acquired by wrong-doing. In order that you may know something of the danger that young people incur owing to ignorance, to foolishness or self-will, I must tell you very briefly what may happen should a woman unfortunately become infected with syphilis. It is very likely that such a woman may have several miscarriages, and then perhaps one or more premature or dead babies. After a time she may have a child born alive, but which lives only a few weeks or months. The poor baby may not look ill when it is born, but it soon begins to suffer from a peculiar disease of the nose called *the snuffles*. A baby that has the snuffles finds it difficult or impossible to suck, because the inside of the nose is so much swollen. In bad cases the disease causes destruction of the little bones in the bridge of the nose, so that the bridge remains always sunken, which gives an unnatural, rather frog-like, appearance to the child's face. When the infant is about six or seven weeks old the body may be covered with rashes, and there may be sores round the mouth and round the opening of the bowel. Sometimes there are blisters on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. These poor babies do not thrive, no food seems to nourish them, and they are known to doctors and nurses as "wasters." A little later on, about six or seven months of age, they sometimes suffer from meningitis and from fits. When syphilitic children are cutting their second

teeth, somewhere about seven years of age, they frequently become blind and deaf, owing to the injury inflicted on their eyes and on their ears by the poison of syphilis. Young people, when they wilfully or carelessly make a premature and improper use of their bodies, do not know, or at any rate they do not realise, how wrong and how foolish they are. They do not consider that syphilis may be caught even if they do wrong only once, and unluckily nobody tells them that the infection lasts for many years, and that they are pretty sure to pass it on to their partner in life and also, sad to say, to their innocent little children. Probably if they knew what they were doing they would be more careful, but young people do not think, nobody warns them, and yet more than half of all the blindness in the country and more than one-third of all the deafness in young people are due to these diseases. To this same cause are due many of the cases of deficient intellect and idiocy amongst little children, and perhaps even more pitiful than this, to syphilis are due some particularly sad cases of paralysis and insanity amongst young people under twenty years of age.

The second venereal disease, gonorrhœa, causes a severe inflammation of any mucous membrane which is attacked. This is most frequently the mucous membrane of the organs of generation. In the case of the woman gonorrhœa frequently leads to such spoiling of her organs that she is rendered incapable of having a child. In some other cases gonorrhœa in the woman causes internal abscesses and other

troubles which necessitate very serious surgical operation. In the case of new-born babies gonorrhœa infection of the eyes caught from the mother while the child is being born, causes so violent an inflammation, so great a swelling of the eyelids, and so much spoiling of the deeper tissues of the eye that in most cases the sight is injured and in many cases total blindness occurs. Indeed we learn from the Registrar-General's reports that 25 per cent. of all the blindness in the country is caused by this infection of the new-born babies' eyes. It is in the hope of teaching mothers how to prevent and how to cure this very sad trouble in their babies that the Government requires that the fact of a baby's birth shall always be notified within forty-eight hours. By this means in cases where a midwife has attended and no doctor is in charge of the mother and baby, it is possible to arrange that if there is any redness and swelling of the eyelids a doctor's services shall be immediately available. This is necessary, because if the child's eyesight is to be saved, treatment must be undertaken very quickly.

* * *

Will you do Your Duty as a Mother?

Now I want to ask you mothers one question. What do you think of your duty towards your children? Now that you know something of the difficulties and the dangers which surround the children that you love so truly and so well, now that you realise that your motherly duty was not finished

when you gave them birth, nor even when you suckled them at the expense of your own freedom and your own comfort, now that you know the danger of letting boys and girls go to work in factories, workshops and domestic service without proper knowl dge and without warning, do you not feel that you can find the necessary courage to tell them all the truth and to let them know that strong as may be their inclinations, and great as may be their temptations, yet if they know of these things beforehand and honestly try to play their part, they are sure to find that God's grace is sufficient and that His strength is made perfect in their weakness?

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